SOME NEW BOOKS.

An English Interpretation of Tolstoy

AN ENGLISH INTERPRETATION OF TOLSTOY.

Those who wish to read Tolstoy's later writings with comprehension and profit may do well to begin with a careful perusal of the book entitled *Tolstoy and His Problems* by AYLMER MAUDE, (A. Wessells Company.) As the author of these essays points out in a preface, there are several reasons why it is difficult for English readers to discern Tolstoy's opinions, or, at any rate, to understand clearly how his views on different subjects fit together. Some of his works have never been translated; others have been translated from sense into nonsense. We are told that even in Russian several of his most important philosophical works are only attainable in the badly edited Geneva edition, which is full of mistakes. Besides these external difficulties, there are difficulties inherent in the subjects discussed, nor is it always easy for the reader to perceive from what side Tolstoy approaches his subject, and to make due allowance for the "personal equation." So that most readers, however open-minded, on perusing books that contain much which runs counter to the established beliefs of our day, and to the hopes of various "advanced" groups, feel a desire to cross-examine Tolstoy personally. They are helped to do this by the book before us. The author is the only Englishman who in recent years has had the advantage of intimate personal intercourse with Tolstoy, continued over a long period. Each of the essays collected in this volume expresses in one form or another Tolstoy's view of life, and the main object of the book is not to praise his views, but to explain them. It is willingly conceded that his conclusions, not being final revelations of the truth attainable by man, may and should be subjected to criticism. But Mr Maude concurs with James Russell Lowell in thinking that a necessary preliminary to profitable criticism is *comprehension*. This necessary preliminary, having heretofore been very frequently neglected in relation to Tolstoy's works, the author's first aim is clearly and simply to re-state certain fundamental principles with which the Russian writer has dealt. The first five essays do this directly and the last four indirectly. Of the first essay in the book, "Talks With Tolstoy," we learn that Tolstoy himself has said: "I very much approve of it. It is admirably constructed, and what is most important is given." Of the essay entitled "What is Art? An Introduction," Tolstoy wrote: "I have read your Introduction with great pleasure. You have admirably and strongly expressed the fundamental thought of my book." Another essay on the "Theory of Art" is also praised: "Your article," wrote Tolstoy, "pleased me exceedingly, so clearly and strongly is the fundamental thought expressed." For one of the essays in this volume, that entitled "War and Patriotism," in which Mr. Maude pleads with singular force and infectious eloquence the cause of the Boers, Tolstoy, of course, is not responsible as regards the statements of fact, although the essay applies his principles, and is animated with his spirit. In the present notice we shall confine ourselves mainly to the biographical and expository data to be found in the first two essays.

I

Count Leo Tolstoy was born on Aug. 28, 1828, at a house in the country not many miles from Tula and about 130 miles south of Moscow. He lost his mother when he was 3 and his father when he was 9 years old. He remembers a boy visiting his brothers and himself when he was 12 years old and bringing the news that they had found out at school that there was no God, and that all that was taught about God was a mere invention. He himself went to school in Moscow, and before he was grown up had imbibed the opinion, current among educated Russians that "religion" is old-fashioned and superstitious, and that sensible and cultured people do not require it for themselves. After leaving school Tolstoy went to the University at Kazan. There he studied Oriental languages, but did not pass the final examination. Subsequently he entered the army, and was first stationed in the Caucasus, where he was with an older brother to whom he was greatly attached. When the Crimean War began Tolstoy applied for active service, and was transferred to an artillery regiment engaged in the defense of Sebastopol. Here he obtained that first-hand knowledge of war which has helped him to speak on the subject with conviction. He saw war as it really is.

When the Crimean War was over Count Leo Tolstoy left the army and settled in St. Petersburg. He was welcome to whatever advantages the society of the capital had to offer for not only was he a nobleman and an officer, just back from the heroic defense of Sebastopol, but he was then already famous as a brilliant writer. He had written short stories since he was 23, and while still young was recognized among Russia's foremost literary men. He had therefore, fame, applause and wealth and at first he found these things very pleasant. But being a man of unusually sincere nature, he began in the second, and still more in the third year of this kind of life to ask himself seriously why people made such a fuss about the stories, novels or poems that he and other literary men were producing. If, said he, our work is really worth what is paid for it and worth praise and applause to boot, it must be that we are saying something of great importance to the world. What, then, is our message? The more he considered the matter the more evident it became to him that the authors and the artists did not themselves know what they had to teach; in fact, that they had nothing of real importance to say, and often relied upon their powers of expression when they had nothing to express. When from their writings he turned to an examination of their lives, he saw that, far from being exceptionally moral and self-denying, they were a more selfish and immoral set of men even than the officers he had been among in the army.

In later years, when Tolstoy had quite altered his views of human existence, he wrote with very great severity of the life he had led when in the army and in Petersburg. The passage occurs in "My Confession:" "I cannot now think of those years without horror, loathing and heartache. I killed men in war, and challenged men to duels in order to kill them; I lost at cards, consumed what the peasants produced, sentenced them to punishments, lived loosely and deceived people. Lying, robbery, adultery of all kinds, drunkenness, violence, murder, there was no crime that I did not commit, and people approved of my conduct, and my contemporaries considered, and still consider me to be, comparatively speaking, a moral man." Many persons have concluded from these lines that, as a young man, Tolstoy led a particularly immoral life. Mr. Maude says that Tolstoy has merely selected the worst incidents, and called them by their harshest names; what to mean by "murder" is war, and when he taxes himself with "robbery," he has in mind his acceptance of the "profits from his estates." In the passage quoted, he, like John Bunyan, is denouncing rather than describing the life he lived as a young man. According to the author of these essays, the simple fact is that Tolstoy lived in an immoral, upper-class society, and to some extent yielded to the example of those around him. He did so, however, with qualms of conscience, and frequent strivings after better things. Even if he be judged as harshly as he judges himself, the fact remains that those among whom he lived considered him to be above their average moral level.

Dissatisfied with his life, sceptical of the utility of his work as a writer and convinced that he could not teach others without first knowing what he had to teach, Tolstoy left Petersburg and retired to an estate in the country near the place where he was born, and where he still spends most of the year. It was the time of the great emancipation movement in Russia. Tolstoy, for his part, did not wait for the decree of emancipation, but voluntarily freed his serfs. His wife told Mr. Maude that he was the first Russian nobleman to do so. In the country Tolstoy attended to his estates, and organized schools for the peasantry. He thought that if he did not know enough to teach the "cultured crowd" in Petersburg, perhaps he could teach peasant children. Eventually, he came to see that before you can know what to teach, even to a peasant child, you must know human life. At this period of his career Tolstoy twice travelled abroad, visiting Germany, France and England, and studying the educational systems, which seemed to him very bad. He observed that children born with different tastes and capacities are put through the same course of lessons, just as coffee beans of different sizes are ground to the same grade. This is done, he perceived, not because it is best for them, but because it is easier for the teachers, and because the parents lead artificial lives and neglect their own children.

In 1862 Tolstoy married. He and his wife have lived to see the century out, a faithful and loving couple. Their affection for one another has not been diminished even by the fact that the Countess does not agree with many of the views expressed by her husband during the last twenty years, and has been dissatisfied with his readiness to part with his property, to associate with "dirty," low-class people, and to refuse payment for his literary work. Thirteen children were born to them, of whom five died young. Mr. Maude submits that the fact that twenty years of such a married life preceded Tolstoy's change of views, and that the opinions he now expresses were formed when he was still as active and vigorous as most men are at half his age, should be a sufficient answer to those who have so misunderstood him as to suggest that, having worn himself out by a life of vice, he now cries "sour grapes," lest others should enjoy pleasures he is obliged to abandon. During the first eighteen years that followed his marriage he wrote the long novels, "War and Peace" and "Anna Karenina." His wife, it seems, copied out "War and Peace" no fewer than seven times, as he altered and improved it again and again. Meanwhile Tolstoy was also busied as a "Mediator of the Peace," adjusting difficulties between the newly-emancipated serfs and their former owners.

II.

The happiness and activity of Tolstoy's family life long kept the great problems that had begun to trouble him in the background. Ultimately, however, the fundamental question, "What is the meaning of my life?" presented itself so clearly and insistently that he began to feel that, unless he could answer it, he could not live. Was wealth the aim of his life? He was highly paid for his books, and he had 20,000 acres of land in the Government of Samara; but suppose he became twice or ten times as rich, he asked himself, would it satisfy him? And, if it did satisfy him, was not death coming to take it all away? Would family happiness, the love of wife and children, satisfy him and explain the purpose of life? There again stood death, threatening not only him, but all those he loved. There was fame! He was making a world-wide literary reputation, which would not be destroyed by his death. He asked himself whether, if he became more famous than Shakespeare, that would satisfy him? He felt that it would not. An author's works outlive him, but they, too, will perish. How many authors are read 1,000 years after their death? Is not even the language we write in constantly altering and becoming archaic? Besides, what is the use of fame when one is no longer here to enjoy it?

As Tolstoy thought more and more about the meaning of life, and failed to find the key to the puzzle, it seemed to him that life is an evil; a thing we must wish to get rid of. Is not the whole thing, he asked, a gigantic and cruel joke, played upon us by some demoniac power, as human beings may play with an ant, defeating all its aims and destroying all it builds? Is not suicide the only way of escape? But, although Tolstoy thus felt for a time strongly drawn towards suicide, he found that he went on living, and he decided to ask those considered most capable of teaching what their explanation of the purpose of life was. So he went to the scientists; the people who studied nature, and dealt with what they called "facts" and "realities." They had nothing to give him, except their latest theory of self-acting evolution. The vital question to Tolstoy was, "What am I here for?" But the question to which the scientists offered a partial reply was, "How did I get here?" which is quite a different matter. Tolstoy turned to the priests; the people whose special business it is to guide men's conduct, and to tell them what they should and what they should not believe. The priests, however, satisfied him as little as had the scientists. The problem that troubled him was a real problem, needing all of man's powers of mind to answer it, but the priests, having, so to speak, signed their thirty-nine articles, were not free to consider it with open minds. They would only think about the problems of life and death subject to the proviso that they should not have to budge from those points to which they were nailed down in advance. Mr. Maude submits that it is no more possible to think efficiently in that way than it is to run well with your legs tied together.

Thus, while the scientists put the wrong question, the priests accepted the real question, but were not free to seek the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth. Moreover, the greatest and most obvious evil that Tolstoy had seen in his life was the prearranged, sympathetic and wholesale method of murder called war. He observed that the priests with very few exceptions, not only did nothing to prevent such wholesale murder, but even went as chaplains with the soldiers to teach them Christianity, but without telling them it was wrong to fight; so, too, the priests blessed ships of war, and prayed God to scatter our enemies, to confound their politics and to frustrate their knavish tricks. They would even say this kind of thing without knowing who the "enemies" were. So long as they are not we—they must be bad and deserve to be "confounded." Not was this all. Professing a religion of love, the priests harassed and persecuted those who professed any other forms of religious belief. Tolstoy tried hard to make himself think as the priests thought, but he was unable to do so.

Then it occurred to him that perhaps, if people could not tell him in words what the object of life is, he might find it out by watching their actions. So, first, he began to consider the lives of those of his own society, people of the middle and upper classes. He noticed among them people of different types. First there were those who led an animal life. Many of these were women, or healthy young men, full of physical vigor. The problem that troubled Tolstoy no more troubled them than it troubles the ox or the ass. Next came those who, though capable of thinking of serious things, were so occupied with their business, professional, literary or Governmental work, that they had no time to think about fundamental problems. They were so busy getting a living that they never asked why they lived. Another large set of people, some of them thoughtful and conscientious, were hypnotized by authority. Instead of thinking with their own heads and asking *themselves* the purpose of life, they accepted an answer given them by some one else; by some Church, or Pope, or book, or newspaper, or Emperor, or minister. People, hypnotized in this way, cease to think seriously of right or wrong, and, where their patriotism is concerned, they are ready to accept the authority of some one who to them typifies their Church or their country. There were a fourth set of people who seemed to Tolstoy the most contemptible of all. These were the "epicureans," people who saw the emptiness and purposelessness of their lives, but said, "Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die." Belonging to the well-to-do classes, and being materially better off than common folk, they made the most of this advantage, and tried to snatch as much pleasure from life as they could.

None of these people could show Tolstoy the purpose of his life. He began to despair, and was more and more inclined to think suicide the best course open to a brave and sincere man. There, however, were the peasants, for whom he had always felt great sympathy, and who lived all around him. How was it that they—poor, ignorant, heavily taxed, compelled to serve in the army and obliged to produce food, clothing and houses, not only for themselves, but for all their superiors—how was it that they, on the whole, seemed to know the meaning of life? They did not commit suicide, but bore their hard lot patiently, and, when death came, met it with tranquillity. The more Tolstoy thought about the subject the more distinctly he recognized that these peasants, tilling the soil and producing those necessaries of life without which the whole population of Russia would starve, were living a comparatively good and natural life, doing what was obviously useful, and that they were nearer to a true understanding of life than the priests or the scribes. He talked of these things with some of the best of the peasants, and found that, even if many of them could not express themselves clearly in words, they had firm ground under their feet. Some of them, too, were remarkably clear in thought and speech, free from superstition, and able to go to the root of the matter. By words as well as by example they helped him to answer the question, "What is the meaning of my life?"

III.

It was in the Gospels, to which the peasants referred him, that Tolstoy found the meaning and purpose of life most plainly expressed. He had always admired many passages in the Gospels, but had been perplexed by much that he had encountered in them. He now re-read them in the following way, which, he says, is the only way in which any books can be studied profitably. He first read them through carefully to see what they contained that was perfectly clear and simple, and that quite agreed with his own experience of life, and accorded with his reason and conscience. Having found, and marked with a blue pencil, this *core* that had been expressed so plainly and strongly that it was easy to grasp, he read the four Gospels again several times, and discovered that much, which at first had seemed obscure or perplexing, became quite reasonable and helpful, when read by the light of what he had already seen to be the main message of the books. Much, indeed, still remained unintelligible, and, therefore, of no use to him. This is to be expected, he thinks, in books dealing in great questions that were written long ago in languages not ours, by people not highly educated, but extremely superstitious. For instance, if one reads that Jesus walked on the water, one may wonder how the statement got into the scriptural narrative, and be baffled by it rather than helped, but it need not hinder the effect of what one has recognized as true.

Reading the Gospels in this way, Tolstoy reached a view of life that answered his question, and that has enabled him to walk sure-footedly, knowing the aim and purpose of his existence, and ready to meet death calmly when it comes. The view which he accepted is the following: "Each one of us has a reason and a conscience that come to us from somewhere; we did not make them ourselves. They oblige us to differentiate between good and evil; we *must* approve of some things and disapprove of others. We are alike in this respect, all members of one family, and in this way sons of one father. In each of us, dormant or active, there is a higher and better nature, a spiritual nature, a 'spark of the divine.' If we open our hearts and minds, we can discern good from evil in relation to our own conduct; the law of right living is 'very near unto you, in your heart and in your mouth.' The purpose of our life on earth should be to serve, not our lower animal nature, but the power to which our higher nature recognizes its kinship. Jesus boldly identifies himself with his higher nature, speaks of Himself and of us, as Sons of the Father, and bids us be perfect, as our Father in Heaven is perfect."

This, then, is the answer which Tolstoy found to the question: What is the meaning and purpose of my life? "There is a Power enabling me to discern what is good, and I am in touch with that Power; my reason and conscience flow from it, and the purpose of my conscious life is to do its will, that is to do good." Neither do the Gospels leave us without guidance as to the ways in which this teaching may be applied to practical life. The Sermon on the Mount had always attracted Tolstoy, but much of it had also perplexed him, especially the text: "Whosoever smiteth thee on the right cheek, turn to him the other also." This injunction seemed to him unreasonable. It shocked all the prejudices of that aristocratic family and personal "honor," in which he had been brought up. He found, however, that, as long as he rejected and tried to explain away that saying, he could get no coherent sense out of the teaching of Jesus or out of the story of His life. As soon, on the other hand, as he admitted that, perhaps, Jesus meant the saying seriously, it was as though he had found the key to a puzzle. Thenceforth the teaching and the example fitted together and formed one admirable whole. He then saw that Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount was definitely summing up his practical advice, pointing out five times over what had been taught by "them of old times," and on each occasion adding the words, "but I say unto you," and giving an extension, or even a flat contradiction, to the old precept.

The following are the five commandments of Christ, an acceptance of which, or even a comprehension of which, followed by an attempt at obedience, would, Tolstoy became convinced, alter the whole course of men's lives. "Ye have heard that it was said to them of old time, Thou shalt not kill; and whosoever shall kill shall be in danger of the judgment; but I say unto you that *every one who is angry* with his brother shall be in danger of the judgment." It seems that in the Russian version, as in our authorized version, the words "without a cause" have been inserted after the word "angry." These words, which, of course, make nonsense of the whole passage, are not found in the best Greek manuscripts, and the interpolation has been corrected in our Revised Version. The first, then, of the five great guiding rules is, *Do not be angry*. Test this injunction any way you like, says Tolstoy, by personal experience, by the advice of other great teachers, or by the example of the best men and women in their best moods, and you will find that the advice is good. If one replies: "I cannot help being angry; it is my nature; I am made so," Tolstoy says, "If you can't abstain from anger altogether, abstain from it as much as you can."

The second of the five guiding rules is: "Ye have heard that it was said, Thou shalt not commit adultery; but I say unto you that *every one that looketh on a woman to lust after her* hath committed adultery with her already in his heart." It is well known that this advice is not generally accepted. In all cities and large towns things exist, such as certain ways of dressing, ways of dancing, certain entertainments, pictures and theatrical posters, which would not exist if everybody understood that lust is a bad thing, spoiling men's lives. Tolstoy recognizes, indeed, that an ordinary man, being an animal, probably cannot help lusting, but he submits that the fact that we are imperfect does not prevent the *advice* from being good. Lust, he says, as little as you can, if you cannot be perfectly pure. The third Gospel rule is: "Ye have heard that it was said to them of old time, Thou shalt not forswear thyself, but shalt perform unto the Lord thine oaths. But I say unto you, Swear not at all. * * * But let your speech be, Yea, yea; Nay, nay." According to Tolstoy, the meaning of this commandment is *not*, as it is commonly interpreted, to emphasize the harm or importance of using a few swear-words. It means: *Do not give away the control of your future actions*. You have a reason and a conscience to guide you; but, if you set them aside and swear allegiance to any one else—Czar, Kaiser, King, Queen, President or General—they may some day tell you to commit the most awful crimes; perhaps even to kill your fellow men. What are you going to do then? To break your oath, or to commit a crime you never would have dreamt of committing had you not first taken an oath? Here we are reminded by Mr. Maude that the present Emperor of Germany, William II., addressed, not long ago, some naval recruits, just after the oath of allegiance had been administered to them. He reminded them that they had now taken the oath, and that, *if he called them out to shoot their own fathers* they must now obey. The whole organized and premeditated system of wholesale murder, called "war," is based and built up in all lands on the practice of inducing people to entrust their consciences to the keeping of others.

It is the fourth and fifth commandments given by Jesus that people most object to: "Ye have heard that it was said, an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth; but I say unto you, *Resist not him that is evil*; but whosoever smiteth thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also." And again: "Ye have heard that it was said, Thou shalt love thy neighbor and hate thine enemy; but I say unto you, Love your enemy." The meaning of these last two commandments, as well as of the other three, is too plain to be misunderstood. What Jesus wished us to do, *the direction in which He pointed us*, and the *example* He set us, are unmistakable. But we are told, "It is impracticable." Tolstoy answers that at least we can *try* to follow the injunction. We can, at all events, be humble and honest about it, and acknowledge the truth of the teaching. It may point to perfection above the level we have reached; but, if we are not good enough to apply it altogether, we should apply it *as far as we can*, and at least not deny it or pervert it, or try by sophistry to debase the teaching to our own level.

After reaching this view of life (about the year 1880 or a little earlier) Tolstoy saw that much which he had formerly considered good was bad, and much which he had thought bad was good. He saw that, if the aim of life is to coöperate with the Father in doing good, we should seek to give as much as possible to others, and to take from others as little as we can. He became a strict vegetarian, eating only the simplest food and avoiding stimulants. He ceased to smoke. He dressed in the simplest and cheapest way. He gave to the peasants a large part of his property. He labored with them in the fields, and found that, hard as the work was, he enjoyed it, and, strange to say, could do better mental work when he allowed himself only a few hours a day for it, than he had been able to do when he gave himself up entirely to literary labor. Instead of writing chiefly novels and stories for the well-to-do and idle classes, he devoted his powers principally to clearing up the perplexing problems of human conduct which seemed to block the path of progress. Besides some essays and letters and some works of fiction (especially short stories for the people, and some folk-stories which he wrote down that they might reach those unaccustomed to go to the peasants for instruction), Tolstoy's chief writings during the last twenty years have been the following: "My Confession," "A Criticism of Dogmatic Theology," never translated; "The Four Gospels Harmonized and Translated," "What I Believe," sometimes called "My Religion," "The Gospel in Brief," "What Must We Do, Then?" "On Life," also called "Life," "The Kreutzer Sonata," a story treating of the sex question, "The Kingdom of God is Within You," "The Christian Teaching," "What is Art?" and "Resurrection," a novel begun about 1895, but laid aside and completely rewritten and published in 1899 for the benefit of the Dukhobors. In these works Tolstoy has examined "the results of good and bad actions," and the "reasonableness or unreasonableness of human institutions and beliefs," he has considered "how human life should be lived in order to obtain the greatest well-being for each," and "what one may and should, and what one cannot and should not believe, how to subdue one's passions and how to acquire the habit of virtue." When Tolstoy began to write boldly and plainly about these things he expected to be persecuted. The Russian Government, however, has considered it wiser not to touch him personally, and has contented itself with prohibiting some of his books, mutilating others and banishing several of those persons who have helped him. Under the auspices of the Holy Synod books have been published denouncing him and his views, his correspondence has been tampered with and spies have been set to watch him and his friends.

IV.

So much for the main facts of Tolstoy's life, as they are set forth by Mr. Maude in the first of the essays here collected. The purpose of the second paper is to preserve some of Tolstoy's *obiter dicta* on matters which, although themselves not of the deepest importance, are at least connected with the great problems of life. The reminiscences of table talk are introduced by our author with the general remark, founded on personal observation, that Tolstoy's opinions do not result from casual likes and dislikes, but are knit together by his perception of the meaning and purpose of human existence. "One could seldom predict what he would say (even on subjects with which I was familiar), and his views often came as a surprise; but when he had spoken it was generally easy to see how the conclusions expressed fitted in with his whole view of life." The difference between the talk of a man like Tolstoy, who has a clear idea of the purpose of human life, and the talk of men who are at sea on that matter is compared in the book before us to the difference between a game of chess played by an expert, where there is a logical sequence between the moves, and a game of ordinary drawing-room chess, where the moves are a series of accidents, mitigated by occasional ideas. Nevertheless, Mr. Maude expresses the apprehension that in an attempt to reproduce Tolstoy's views of books and writers, for example, it will be easier to convey the unorthodoxy than the validity of some of his opinions.

Tolstoy thinks, we are told that novel writing both in England and France stands on a much lower level to-day than it did when he was a young man. Dickens and Victor Hugo, who were then in their prime, dealt with subjects of vital importance and treated them so that their readers caught their feeling. Now, Tolstoy says, writers are dealing with all sorts of social problems, psychological studies, copyings of nature, ethical conundrums and pseudo-scientific puzzles, but, for the most part, they fail to deal with essential matters in such a way as to reach the hearts of the people. Among contemporary English novelists whose works he has read, he does not know of any whom he esteems more than Mrs. Humphry Ward. His main objection to Olive Schreiner's "Dreams" seems to have been that the author deals with some problems of immense importance without so clear and firm a perception of their bearings as would enable her to give right guidance to those who are attracted by her poetic treatment, and by her sympathetic leanings toward what is good. Zola is commended from one point of view. Here, says Tolstoy, are we all talking about the "people," about their rights and about the ways of elevating them; and here is Zola, who has depicted common people and shown us—"There!—these are the folk you are talking about." On the other hand, in Tolstoy's opinion Zola's realism, in so far as it consists in photographing a mass of details, is not art, transmitting feeling from man to man. "Man must discriminate between what is essential and what is worthless in life, not pile up mountains of undigested facts and this is true of the artist as well as of the man." "Sienkiewicz," says Tolstoy, "is always reasonable; but what he writes is tinged with his Catholicism. In *Quo Vadis* the Christians and pagans are too white and too black; they should shade off into each other and overlap, as they must have done in real life, and as the persecuted Russian Stundists to-day shade off into and mix with the Russian orthodox."

We learn that Tolstoy speaks very highly of Matthew Arnold's writings on religion. He says that the usual estimate puts Arnold's poems first, his critical writings second, and his religious works third; but that this is just the reverse of a true estimate. Tolstoy considered that Arnold's essay on his own (Tolstoy's) writings contained sound and just criticism. The author of the book before us recalls that "not the least among the services rendered by Matthew Arnold and William Dean Howells is the cordial welcome with which, many years ago, each of them on his own side of the Atlantic greeted an author whose views are, even to-day, singularly little understood by some who profess to admire them." Mr. Maude says that, wishing to induce Tolstoy to admit the merits of some of Matthew Arnold's poems, he marked a few and sent them to him. The book was returned in a few days with the remark that the poems were very good, "but what a pity they were not written in prose!" It is conceded that in poetry Tolstoy is hard to please. "Why," he asks, "need men hamper the clear utterance of their thoughts by selecting a style which obliges them to choose, not the words which best convey their meaning, but those which best enable them to make the lines scan? If we can say what we have to say in three words, why use five? Or, if a word or two more will avoid the risk of being misunderstood, why not add them?" Tolstoy admits that people have written valuable things in verse, but he thinks they could in most cases have said them better in prose. How much worthless stuff, he adds, has been circulated merely for the sake of the skill with which it was expressed. Mr. Maude once asked Tolstoy how he accounted for the supreme rank among authors accorded to Shakespeare in Russia and elsewhere. He said he explained it to himself by the fact that the "cultured crowd" who care for literature have no clear idea of the purpose and aim of life. They can thus most readily and heartily admire an author who is like themselves in this respect, that is, one who has no central standpoint from which to measure his relation to all else. In Tolstoy's opinion Shakespeare owes his great reputation to the fact that he is an artist of great and varied abilities; but he owes it yet more to the fact that he shares with his admirers the great weakness that he has not found the answer to the question, What are we alive for?

It is especially interesting to hear that, for the socialism of Karl Marx, and the theory that fate has decreed that the control of the implements of production must pass into fewer and fewer hands before the condition of the masses can improve, Tolstoy has as little respect as he has for Malthus's law of the superfecundity of the human race. Such attempts to ascertain and to declare, as final and immutable, certain "laws of human nature" discovered not subjectively—by knowing man's heart—but by mere external observations, do not commend themselves to him. He especially objects to the demand that we should adjust our actions to such imaginary laws and subordinate to them the moral scruples which form part of our inner consciousness. He does not hold with those who say, "Things are wrong, but it is all God's fault and is inevitable. Were we to act as our consciences demand, no good would come of it. The only sensible thing to do is to go on acting in the way, which has produced wrong social conditions, until the Social Democrats reorganize society by means of a parliamentary majority." Neither does he accept the position taken by many church people, who say something of the same kind; only they want us to wait, not for a Social Democratic majority, but for the millennium. In opposition to such views, Tolstoy holds that, if we would know the will of God and be willing co-workers with Him, there is only one way, and that is to be as *good* as we can. If we all did that, property and the means of production would *not* accumulate in fewer and fewer hands, nor should we breed like rabbits up to the limits of the food supply, nor should we need to wait for the external coming of a Kingdom, that must be within us before it can be externally manifest.

If Tolstoy is not a Socialist, much less is he an Anarchist. Thus, while he has a high opinion of Prince Kropotkin as an earnest and honorable worker in the cause of human brotherhood, he much regrets that Kropotkin does not explicitly and decidedly express disapproval of all violence, whether directed *against* governments or used *by* governments. "He must see," says Tolstoy, "that by excusing violence, he cuts the ground from under his own feet." Tolstoy is convinced that, if the struggle in Russia to-day were clearly one between men in power, trying to enforce their will by violence, and reformers saying and doing what they believe to be right and repudiating all violence, the sympathy of every good man would be against the Government. By employing force and justifying its use, the Anarchist confuses the issue and obliges people to choose between two sets of men, each abusing the other, and each saying that it is right to kill some men and to use violence sometimes. Tolstoy points out that Kropotkin in his work, "*La Conquête du Pain*," does not explain how he expects the transition from the old to the new order to come about. "It is not to come gradually, as a consequence of a change in our perceptions, characters and aims, but it is to be introduced by a revolution to which a section of society objects. How is this to be done? By using force! But the use of force causes dislike and hatred and the wish to retaliate. So that the Anarchist-Communist, having overthrown the existing order of society by force, will have to guard against attempts to restore it by force; and there will again be some people governing others, not by convincing them, but by coercing them."

It appears that Herbert Spencer is not a favorite of Tolstoy. Asked one day whether he had made a careful study of Spencer's many volumes, he replied: "I have set to work several times, but it is like chewing chaff!" Mr. Maude finds the fundamental difference between the views of the two men in the following point: "To Herbert Spencer and his school the *real* things are the *external* phenomena observed through our senses. These are called upon to explain everything, even to explain our subjective consciousness of a moral law. To Tolstoy the latter consciousness is the surest and most fundamental perception we possess." That we discern a difference between good and evil is for him the *starting point* of all thought and activity. In his own words: "Goodness is really the fundamental metaphysical conception which forms the essence of our consciousness. It is a conception not defined by reason; it is that which can be defined by nothing else, but which defines everything else; it is the highest, the eternal aim of life. Whatever our perception of the good may be, our life is nothing but an effort toward the good, that is toward God. The good is that which we call God." At the same time we learn from the author of these essays that Tolstoy readily admits that the Synthetic Philosophy has its very strong side. Our senses make us aware of external phenomena, and our perceptions of phenomena are subject to fixed laws which can be investigated. As long as we do not forget that it is merely the relation of our perceptions to phenomena that we are dealing with, such investigation is in its place, and materialistic philosophy may be admirable and valid.

Of J. S. Mill's work Tolstoy remarks that what he liked best was the "Autobiography." "It is amazing," says Tolstoy, "that a man should have gone so far in his experience of life, and should have put the vital question so clearly and so well, and yet should have stopped short without finding the answer." Mill asked himself whether the realization of all the projects for the well-being of humanity on which he was engaged would make him happy, and he frankly admitted that it would not. He was thus left face to face with the question: "What, then, is the real purpose of my existence?" Tolstoy's reply would be to this effect: "The purpose of my life is to understand, and, as far as possible, to do the will of that power which has sent me here, and actuates my reason and consciousness." Mill, for his part, found no answer, and lived on with a sense that the brightness had faded from life.

Mr. Maude tells us that to the drift of thought represented by Nietzsche, Tolstoy attaches great and sinister importance. We are reminded that at the time of the Renaissance a movement of animalism showed itself in Europe, but that the revolt of man's lower nature soon broke its force against the seriousness that then still lived in Church Christianity. A similar tendency to animalism is now reviving, and expressing itself in the philosophy of Nietzsche and in the art of the Decadents, but it now meets no such form dible breakwater, the churches being too rotten to offer serious resistance to it. Tolstoy, feeling that the only power capable of resisting the attacks of materialism and animalism is the "inward light" operating through man's reason and conscience, is ready to welcome anything that shows how untenable are the positions which churchmen still try to defend, and how inadequate are the proofs they rely on. To exemplify this readiness Mr. Maude cites the following incident. The Russian reformer had one day been reading a book by a German professor, pretending to show that, as an historical personage, Jesus Christ probably never existed. This delighted Tolstoy. "They are attacking the last of the outworks," said he, "and if they carry it and demonstrate that Christ never was born, it will be all the more evident that the fortress of religion is impregnable. Take away the church, the traditions, the Bible, and even Christ himself, the ultimate fact of man's knowledge of goodness, that is, of God, directly through reason and conscience, will be as clear and certain as ever and it will be seen that we are dealing with truths that can never perish—truths that mankind can never afford to part with."

V.

We should not take leave of "Talks With Tolstoy" without noting what the Russian reformer has to say about educational methods. Mr. Maude recalls that, speaking on education, Tolstoy pointed out that if a child lacked appetite, we do not force food down his throat with a spoon, but we give him fresh air and exercise. "So, if a child lack desire for knowledge, do not cram his head with lessons, which may make him permanently hate learning, but rather seek for him those healthy conditions in which the child's natural desire for knowledge will revive." Again, education begins at home, in a sense not usually recognized. "We must not hope to bring up our children well, so long as we ourselves live in artificial and abnormal surroundings. We cannot go on living wrongly, and yet educate them well. If the children see the parents living simply, and doing work the need for which is obvious, they will soon wish to share in the activities of the grown-up people and will take pains to learn to do so. Then, too, if the parents themselves are keenly alive to questions of general interest this will excite the curiosity of the children also, and the latter will begin to think and to pick up knowledge almost instinctively." Sending children away to school and letting them become estranged from their parents just when their minds are forming is pronounced by Tolstoy a shirking of parental duties. In a word, education and instruction are two different things. "When it is a question of imparting instruction, it is quite right that classes should be formed and that children should learn together. There is a natural competition among children, the stimulus of which should not be lost by isolating them from their fellows."

VI.

None of Tolstoy's later writings has provoked so much animadversion, or, perhaps we should say, has proved so unintelligible, as the book entitled "What is Art?" In two of the essays here collected Mr Maude undertakes the interpretation of that work. In the book mentioned Tolstoy considers and puts aside the physiological, evolutionary definition of art given by Schiller, Darwin and Herbert Spencer. The definition is summed up thus: "Art is an activity arising even in the animal kingdom, and springing from sexual desire and the propensity to play." This, though acknowledged to be superior to the definitions which depend on the conception of beauty, is pronounced inexact, "because, instead of speaking about the artistic activity itself, which is the real matter in hand, it treats of the *derivation* of art." Tolstoy's own definition runs as follows: "Art is a human activity, consisting in this, that one man consciously, by means of certain external signs, hands on to others feelings he has lived through, and that other people are infected by those feelings, and also experience them." The definition is thus expanded and expounded by the author of these essays: "Art is possible because we share one common human nature. The touch of nature makes the whole world kin. All who are capable of experiencing the simple thrill familiar to the plainest man, and even to a child, to wit: the sense of infection with another's feeling that compels us to joy in another's gladness, to grieve in another's grief and to mingle souls with another, possess the mental and emotional telegraph wires along which an artist's influence may pass." Now, as to the difference between art and science. "A common crowd may be swayed by an orator, but not by the ablest mathematical lecturer; for, whereas *thoughts* can only be transferred to minds sufficiently prepared to receive them, the *feelings*, that are the birthright of our common humanity, are shared by all normal people. When an orator fails to sway his audience, we say the orator has failed—not the audience. But, when a boy fails to understand the fifth proposition of Euclid, because he has not understood those that preceded it, we do not say that Euclid has failed, but that the boy has not understood him. Science is a human activity, transmitting thoughts from man to man; art is a human activity, transmitting feelings." The two human activities have some features in common. "Clearness, simplicity and compression are desirable in both, and the same book, or the same speech may contain both science and art; but there is a fundamental difference, though both alike are indispensable means of communication, without which mankind could not exist."

If we accept Tolstoy's definition, it is obvious that art covers a much wider ground than we have been accustomed to suppose. "All human life is filled with works of art of every kind, from cradle-song, jests, mimicry, the ornamentation of houses, dress and utensils, up to church services, buildings, monuments and triumphal processions. It is all artistic activity." We generally use the word art, however, in a general and restricted sense, to mean, not all human activity that deliberately transmits feelings, "but only that part which we for some reason select from it and to which we attach special importance." Before considering what kind of art deserves to be thus specially selected for our highest esteem, Tolstoy clearly distinguishes between two different things, to-wit: The subject matter of art and the form of art apart from its subject matter. As soon as this distinction is made, the vexed question of the relation of art to morality is easily solved. Taking art, in the first place, apart from its subject matter, Tolstoy says: "There is one indubitable indication distinguishing real art from its counterfeit, namely, the infectiousness of art." If a man on seeing another man's work experiences a mental condition which unites him with that man, and with other people who also see that work, then the object invoking that mental condition is a work of art. Again, "not only is infection a sure sign of art, but the sole measure of artistic excellence." That is to say, the stronger the infection, the better is the art, *as art*, and considered apart from its subject matter, the quality of the feeling transmitted being for the moment overlooked. From this point of view art has really nothing to do with morality. The feelings transmitted may be good or bad feelings and may produce the best or the worst results on those influenced by them. Yet in either case, the man who transmits them is an artist.

Art, however, is "a human activity," and, consequently, does not exist for its own sake, but is valuable or objectionable in proportion to the benefits or the harm it brings to mankind. Its subject-matter consists of feelings which are contagious or infectious, that is, which can spread from man to man. Is it not supremely important *what sort of* feelings spread among us? From this point of view, which is Tolstoy's, the connection between morality and art is seen to be intimate and inevitable. It is a fact of human life, from which we can no more escape than we can from gravitation. Art unites men, and the better the feelings in which it unites them, the better it will be for mankind. The best subject matter of art is that which directly or indirectly tends to forward brotherly union among all men.

Such as Mr. Maude has outlined them are Tolstoy's essential views of art. They have been described in certain quarters as "clotted nonsense," and "confusion worse confounded." To many readers, on the other hand, they will seem manifestly and fundamentally true, and it is certain that they deserve careful study rather than abuse.

M. W. H.